

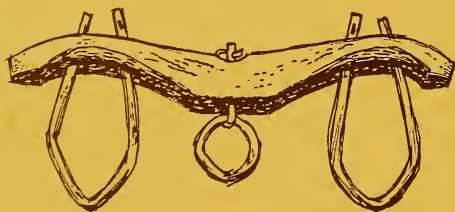
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Bernstorff, Johann von

Abraham Lincoln as the Germans
regarded him.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS THE GERMANS

REGARDED HIM

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- ADDRESS -

Delivered at Springfield, Ill.,
February 12th, 1913.

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By

COUNT J. BERNSTORFF

German Ambassador to the
United States.

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Frederick Douglass

7/24/54 *Answer*

When Goethe had attained a very high age and had reached the summit of his fame, the witty and sarcastic remark was once made with regard to him, that even Cicero would not have been sufficiently impudent to deliver a panegyric on such a man. This remark would seem to apply to me if I ventured to eulogize Abraham Lincoln before a representative assembly of Americans, who are much more familiar with the history of this great hero than I am. All the more so as I have not the least claim to being a Cicero

when I speak in a language which is not my own and to the beauty of which I cannot do full justice. As you, however, have honored me by asking me to speak at this anniversary, I will venture to make a few remarks on Abraham Lincoln as he appeared to the Germans of his day and of the later generations. The election of Lincoln in 1860 was a product of the movement largely supported by the citizens of German birth and extraction, that had led to the foundation, four years previous, of a new national party.

Lincoln's personality as shown in his honesty of purpose, the courage of his convictions, and last but not least, by his big heart, whose every throb was for the whole people, strongly appealed to the German sentiment.

At this day, as we look back to the time of Lincoln and recall the trials with which he was confronted and which he successfully overcame, we can realize what a strong man he was. He was a born leader, in truth the savior of your country. Though he must often have been at the end of his resources, he always displayed an

inspiring confidence, and in his was highly developed that rare characteristic of winning men to his side. Such a hero would naturally have a strong attraction for the American citizens of German birth of his time, most of whom - I need only mention the greatest among them, Carl Schurz - were so consumed with the passion of liberty that they came here in search of freedom, after the political movement of 1848 had failed to give our own nation the unity and liberal institutions which we now enjoy. It will always be a proud boast of the American

citizens of German extraction that in their ancestors the immortal Lincoln had as strong supporters as ever championed the cause of a leader.

When Lincoln had, to use his own words, to accept war for a worthy subject, he found the same support on the part of the Americans of German birth. During the Civil War there were, according to the records of the American Sanitary Commission, 187,158 Germans, born in Germany, enlisted in the different regiments of the northern states. When Abraham Lincoln called

on Missouri for her quota of soldiers, the Governor replied defiantly, that Missouri never would furnish soldiers to fight her sister states. But that Governor had overlooked the fact that long before the outbreak of the Rebellion the Germans in St. Louis and other places, had drilled the members of their atheletic clubs in the manual of arms for the defence of the Union. Their strength and their influence saved Missouri for the Union. At the close of the Civil War, Missouri had contributed more soldiers to the

Northern Army than Massachusetts, the so-called rock of Anti-Slavery. I recently read with great pleasure the vivid description which Mr. Winston Churchill has given of this episode of the Civil War in his brilliant novel, "The Crisis".

In acting as they did, these Germans only showed the same sentiments which were prevalent in their old home. The influence of such men as Lieber and the fact of a German emigration to America of a highly intellectual quality since 1848 were circumstances

undoubtedly influential in establishing in the mother country sympathy for the northern cause. Andrew D. White, the distinguished Ambassador to Germany on his visit to Europe at that time found friends among all classes of Germans. In one of his later public speeches he said: "Of one thing I then and always reminded my hearers - namely, that during our Civil War, when our national existence was trembling in the balance and our foreign friends were few, the German press and people were steadily at our side. Germans

everywhere recognized the real question at issue in the American struggle.

Everywhere on German soil was a deep detestation of human bondage.

Frankfort-on-the-Main became a most beneficial center of financial influences, and from the first to last Germany stood firmly by us.

Germany gave not only her sympathy, but her gold, in defense of the Union and the purchase of United States bonds in the German financial centres contributed very largely toward sustaining the Union in the long struggle which the

Government was forced to make against the powerful Southern Confederacy.

What the Germans most admired in Abraham Lincoln, and what I believe made him the greatest leader in the greatest crisis of your national life, was that in him "The native hue of resolutions" was not "sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought."

He did not indulge in the delusion, that the Union could be maintained or restored without a conflict of arms. Although he abhorred war for any purpose, the firmness of his

moral courage enabled him to take the great responsibility of leading the nation into a war for union and freedom and through weary years of alternating success and disaster. He did not waver for a moment when many anti-coercion meetings were held and a cry for peace at any price arose on all sides. The confidence he felt he expressed in the words: "Let us have the faith that right makes might and in that faith let us to the end do our duty as we understand it."

In our days there is a strong

Peace movement sweeping over all countries, and who will deny that it seems a beautiful idea to save the world forever from the mighty scourge of war. On the other hand, we must not forget that peace should never be bought at the price of sacrificing our ideals. There is always a danger that we might regard material prosperity as our chief aim and object. Every man should be ready to give his life for something beyond his selfish interests. I have often heard it said at peace meetings that all the

wars in the course of history could have been prevented if the leaders of the nations had been more filled with the milk of human kindness when they approached the questions at issue. Seldom has any of the rulers of men been more kind-hearted than Abraham Lincoln. He hated to see any creature suffer, and nevertheless he was under the moral obligation to decide for war instead of peace. He felt and said that: how the question of slavery was decided "did not mean much to a man of fifty, but a great

deal to the posterity of the people in all coming time, because thoughtful men must feel that the fate of civilization in this country was involved in the issue of the contest."

The unity of your nation could not have been maintained without war, just as 90 years before the colonies could not have gained their independence without fighting.

The history of my own country tells the same tale. Religious freedom in Germany would not have been

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won if the nation had not been ready to sacrifice its material prosperity during the thirty years of one of the most terrible wars of all history.

Likewise the unity of the German nation, which had been its constant hope and ideal for nearly 100 years, could never have been restored, if the people had not been ready to suffer the terrible ordeal of three wars in 1813, 1866, and 1870. The craving of the soul of the German nation for unity is the last but not least reason I should mention which

influenced our people in their sympathy with Abraham Lincoln and his policy.

In those days the United States was represented in Berlin by George Bancroft, one of your most eminent historians and statesmen. It is a great pleasure to read the exceedingly interesting letters he wrote from Berlin, the most significant of which have been published not long ago. Bancroft brought a true sympathy and understanding to the observation and to the direction of the relations with Germany. His attitude assured him a

Again and again Bancroft states that Bismarck and the king were true to the Union during the Civil War and averse to any recognition of the independence of the Southern Confederacy, whenever such proposals were put forward from other quarters. In another letter we hear that Moltke said to Bancroft: "The Americans at least are truly our friends." Under a later date Bancroft tells us of a dinner he gave the day of the inauguration of General Grant as President of the United States. Bismarck was among the

cordial acceptance in Berlin, he was received into the inner circles of scholarly social and political life, and formed habits of friendship with Bismarck and Moltke. The political situation of Europe was such that Bancroft regarded the unitarian tendencies in both countries as correlating. In one letter he writes: The inhabitants of Germany are thoroughly friendly to us. And well they may be. But for the triumph of the Union in America, it could not have succeeded in Germany.

guests and held a short speech. After referring to the time of Frederick the Great, Bismarck continued: "As to the subsequent relations between the two countries, it gives me the greatest pleasure to be able to state as a fact not only from my personal experience as a minister of Prussia, but from the archives of its history, that the cordial understanding, so happily inaugurated by Washington and Frederick, has never suffered even the slightest jar. Not only has no difficulty ever arisen between the

two countries, nothing has ever occurred between them which so much as called for an explanation."

I will close my address with the fervent wish, that such relations of friendship between our two countries may always continue.

the following, in which the
author has been most successful

in the use of his language.

It is a book of great value

and interest, and is highly

recommended to all who

are interested in the

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